

The Differential Impact of the Vietnamese Economic Stimulus Package on Women and Men



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UN VIETNAM *and* MEKONG ECONOMICS

November 2009

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CIT	Corporate Income Tax
ESP	Economic Stimulus Package
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
PIT	Personal Income Tax
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
VAT	Value Added Tax

This report by Mekong Economics Ltd. was prepared for UNIFEM Vietnam. The report was drafted by Lorraine Corner, Adam McCarty, and Katherine Guy. Comments and advice were provided by Suzette Mitchell and Kathleen Selvaggio of UNIFEM. The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent the views of UNIFEM, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organizations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2008-2009 financial crisis caused a global economic recession. In response Vietnam, along with many countries in the Asia-Pacific region, implemented an economic stimulus package (ESP). This paper considers the gender implications of such stimulus packages to improve eventual outcomes, not just in terms of rights but also in terms of economic efficiency and productivity. We look, firstly, at how financial crises – and government responses – have different consequences for men and women because many industries in developing countries are sex-stereotyped so that women dominate the workforces of textiles, garments and electronics, while men dominate the construction workforce. The 1997-1998 Asian Financial Crisis provided lessons for responding to future economic crises with an argument for gender-responsive planning and budgeting to ensure that both sexes will benefit substantially from the use of public resources.

Secondly, we examine the fiscal response of the Vietnamese and other Asia-Pacific governments to the present crisis from a gender perspective. In Vietnam, the global recession has caused an estimated decline of 1.5-2% in gross domestic product (GDP) growth in 2009. The declining export prices and foreign investment have mostly impacted the export-oriented industries. Vietnam's ESP has focused on subsidized loans to increase credit for enterprises, public investment and social security packages and tax reductions. Vietnam's economic recovery is being led by the male-dominated construction industry while the female-dominated manufacturing sectors are still facing challenges resulting in gender bias.

Finally, in order to implement a more gender aware response to this and future crises we recommend that governments:

1. Recognize the different impacts on women and men, and design responses accordingly. In particular, response measures should be based on analysis showing which sectors and workers (women, men, formal, informal) are most affected and be specifically designed to ensure that those workers and sectors benefit.
2. Consider the impact of the crisis on women's domestic (unpaid labour) and care roles in designing the fiscal response.
3. Monitor household coping strategies and ensure that the fiscal response is explicitly designed to minimize the negative effects on women and girls of such strategies, such as reducing expenditure on female health and/or education and increasing women's participation in informal sector low paid work with poor working conditions.
4. Provide access to basic social protection for poor households.
5. Monitor the impact of the crisis through gender-sensitive child-centered data and use such data to adjust the implementation of fiscal response measures to maximize benefits and minimize harm to women and children.

We conclude that while it is probably now too late for major changes to allocations within the current ESP, it is not too late to change the way in which they are implemented. Such gender-responsive planning and budgeting can lead to greater results, not just for women, but for the economy and welfare of the Vietnamese people as a whole.

FINANCIAL CRISES AND GOVERNMENT RESPONSES LEAD TO DIFFERENT OUTCOMES FOR MEN AND WOMEN

The evidence from past crises, whether the result of natural disasters or human induced financial crises, show that women, particularly those in poor households and socially excluded groups, are especially vulnerable to the negative impacts – both initially, and in “second round” impacts (Gender Action Partnership Group 2009, ILO 2009a, UNIFEM 2009).

The first round impacts of both the financial crisis and the fiscal response to it fall in somewhat different ways on women and men. Sex-segregation in the labour force by sector, occupation and type of employment contract results in very different impacts of the crisis on women and men. Men typically have higher paying jobs in higher productivity sectors and are in more skilled occupations with benefits and unemployment insurance. Women often constitute the majority of temporary, low-skilled and informal workers in low productivity and often export-oriented sectors (ILO 2009a, UNIFEM 2009).

TEXT BOX 1. WOMEN WORKERS ARE ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE TO THE CRISIS

Data from the 2005 (1st quarter) Labour Force Surveys of Thailand and the Philippines, and 2004 Living Standards Measurement Survey of Vietnam show that employment patterns, and thus vulnerability to the impacts of the crisis, differ sharply between women and men. The employed workforce in seven industries reported to be badly affected by the global crisis differed markedly by sex. The majority of workers in the garments, textiles and electronics industries were women: with two to five female workers for every male worker. Garments, textiles, electronics and electrical products, and hotels and restaurants also provided a substantial share of women’s total employment in the three countries.

The large proportion of female labour in export-oriented industries and services means that women have suffered the first job cuts during the crisis in the three countries. A significant loss of jobs in these industries will erode many of the gains in paid employment made by women in the past two or three decades. Except for the automotive, electronics and footwear industries, women were also more likely than men to be in non-regular employment. This contributes to their lower earnings and greater vulnerability because non-regular workers are less likely to be entitled to social insurance and severance pay and do not have the same opportunities to negotiate for fair dismissal conditions. (ILO 2009a: 2-3).

Since the 2008-2009 financial crisis began, the major global export-oriented industries, including the labour-intensive exports from developing countries, have contracted. In developing countries, women are concentrated in the employed workforces of the labour-intensive exports and the contraction of these industries implies huge risks for women workers in developing countries. Additionally, temporary, casual, seasonal and contract labourers and low-skilled workers, primarily women workers, are being laid-off first (ILO 2009a). According to the ILO (2009a, p.1), “the preponderance and concentration of women in export-oriented industries, [means that women] will be severely affected by the crisis.”

**TEXT BOX 2. COPING STRATEGIES AFFECT HEALTH AND NUTRITION
AND CHILDREN'S EDUCATION**

Lanh works in Sao Vang Shoe Company in Hai Phong city, Vietnam, whilst her husband and sons live in distant Thai Binh province. Their survival depends on Lanh's income. Until the recession hit, the family's situation had been improving. Lanh used to return home every two weeks with money for them and both boys were in school. Now, shoe orders have dropped and half of her co-workers have been made redundant. Although she is still working full time her income has been halved, leaving her with just US \$20 for herself and US \$30 for the family each month. Lanh feels lucky to still have a job.

With only US \$20 to live on, and facing ever rising food prices, she eats one small meal a day. Lanh cannot afford clean water so uses water from a hand dug well. Surviving on small amounts of vegetables and rice, she says she feels malnourished and weak.

Lanh's oldest son has dropped out of school and is now seeking work and she worries about her second child. Tuition fees are approximately US \$ 235 – the equivalent of almost five months wages at her current rate of pay. (Action Aid, 2009)

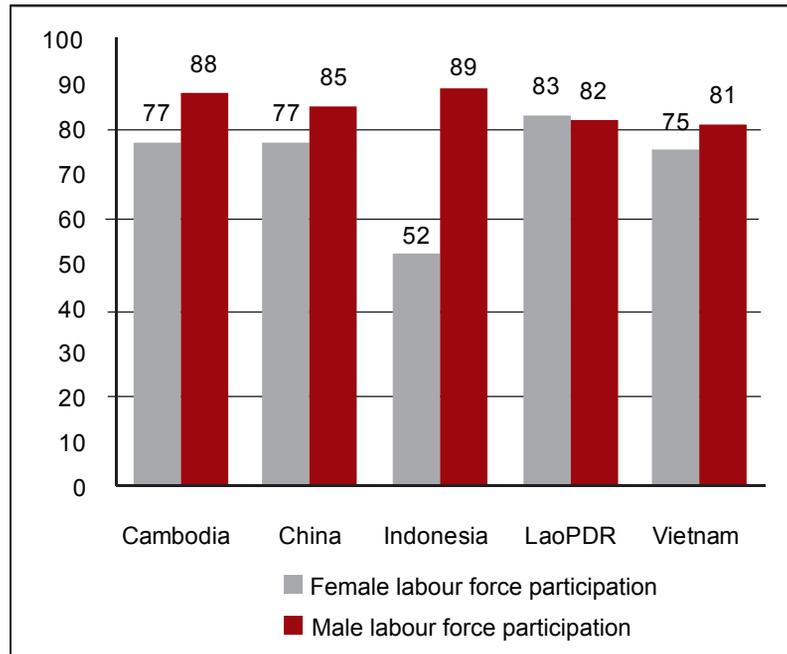
The second round impacts, generated by household coping strategies, typically affect women much more than men. Women and girls often have limited legal rights and protection against, for example, unemployment, few assets, low levels of earned income, and limited decision-making authority within households (UNIFEM 2009). As incomes are reduced, families are forced to replace market goods and services with subsistence production and unpaid work. Women play a major role in the subsistence production, particularly of poultry and vegetables, and provide most of the unpaid work.

Although their unpaid contribution to the economy is usually unrecognized and uncounted, women are important economic agents. If unpaid family work, informal sector work and household tasks (e.g. carrying and fetching water) were included in the measurement of labour force participation and economic output, women's economic contribution of women would exceed that of men. In terms of the impact on children and the elderly, women's role as economic agents is even more important than the size of their contribution to household income might suggest because they tend to spend more of their earnings than men do on the needs of the family than men.

Chart 1 shows that women participate in the formal Vietnamese economy to almost the same extent as men. If informal and unpaid work were included, women would clearly be the main contributor in terms of participation and hours.

Time use surveys show that women work more hours than men because most women work in the economy as well as doing most of the unpaid and care work in the household. Poorer households in particular rely more on unpaid household and care work for children, the elderly, the sick and the disabled because they cannot afford market substitutes.

CHART 1: LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION BY SEX



As men and women have different formal employment concentrations, they will experience economic dislocation differently and benefit differentially from government responses. For example, some sectors that are seriously affected by the crisis, such as construction, mainly employ men (ILO 2009a) and are typically targeted for assistance by fiscal response packages. Other sectors, such as petty trade and micro-enterprises that mainly employ women may be equally negatively affected but are largely overlooked in crisis responses.

Where government support is given is therefore important, and so also is how it is given. Large-scale public investment programs, for example, are a popular strategy for job creation in most fiscal packages. A gender perspective observes that such programs usually employ men (while most actual lost jobs may have been women employed in factories), and overlook potentially serious negative effects on women and children. Infrastructure programs are usually located far from the homes of their workers. The men often spend most of their wages in the area where they work; leaving their families limited benefit from their incomes. Men may also bring back STDs and HIV and infect their wives and unborn children (through mother to child transmission). Locally-based small-scale infrastructure programs would avoid many of these risks and offer greater benefits to women and children.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE 1997-1998 ASIAN FINANCIAL CRISIS

Although the current financial crisis differs in nature, the 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis provides insight into the impacts on women workers during financial crises. During the 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis, job losses along gender lines occurred with a greater impact on women in Thailand, Indonesia and South Korea. In Thailand 95% of workers in the garment sector and 88% of workers in the manufacturing sector who lost their jobs in the 1990s were women (Hutchinson 2009). In South Korea, for every man, seven women were laid off (Aslanbeigui & Summerfield 2000) probably because of the gender-based stereotype that men are the primary breadwinners and women the primary caretakers (ILO 2009a).

In times of hardship, and especially among low-income and poor families, women are often obliged to provide a safety net through informal paid and unpaid work. Women find alternative jobs more quickly because they are also often more willing to accept lower paying jobs and informal work than men (ILO 2009a: 6). In the Philippines more men than women lost their jobs because women were more willing to work for lower wages than men (Illo 1998 in ILO 2009a) (This is sometimes described as the “added worker” or “distressed worker” phenomenon (ILO 2009a). In Indonesia, the Indonesia Family Life Survey 1997 and 1998 found that although the numbers of men in the labour force changed little, the numbers of women increased, most working as self-employed or unpaid family workers in small businesses (Aslanbeigui & Summerfield 2000; Thomas et al 2000). The fall in women’s average working hours in the formal sector was more than in that of men’s, but the proportion of women more than 45 hours per week increased from 23% in 1997 to 25% in 1998 (ILO 2009a: 7).

Low-skilled workers were more affected than professional and better educated workers. However, some women found work in businesses looking for low-cost solutions by substituting higher wage male labourers with women working for lower wages (ILO 2009a). Others in export processing zones lost their jobs as regular employees but were then re-hired as casual workers at lower wages (Aslanbeigui & Summerfield 2000). The impact of a financial crisis is not uniform across regions, sectors or between women and men. Nevertheless, some general lessons emerge from the 1997-1998 experience that are relevant to a gender analysis of the current crisis:

1. The fiscal response should be targeted to address the impact in the regions, sectors and households most directly affected.
2. Rural households are likely to adopt coping strategies that may have a negative impact on the long-term welfare and capacity of women and children, such as women having to seek small cash incomes and pass on domestic chores to children, who may have to drop out of school to help.
3. Addressing the impact of the crisis and alleviating poverty are different and require different kinds of responses.
4. Household expenditure on education is not significantly reduced.
5. Household expenditure on health services is reduced more sharply, with consequent negative effects for women, including pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, and children. Therefore fiscal stimulus packages should prioritize support for health care
6. Fiscal response programs should prioritize investments in infrastructure that are labour intensive and will contribute to productivity and long-term welfare without adding significant long-term costs to the routine budget.
7. Although the type of employment created by infrastructural investment tends to be dominated by men, women can and in many cases already do such work, and infrastructure programs can be designed specifically to create jobs for both women and men.
8. Small-scale infrastructure investment that is based on the use of local resources for constructing local roads, bridges, water supplies, traditional markets, irrigation channels and local electricity can be more effective than large-scale equipment-based infrastructural investments in generating employment and is more gender-responsive in ensuring that benefits reach the wives and families of those employed.
9. Local-level infrastructure projects can also be more effective in providing appropriate employment for women.

10. The long-term impact of programs needs to be considered. Welfare programs initiated during the crisis were typically later abandoned as governments sought to reduce budget deficits.
11. Governments need to explore ways of providing sustainable and affordable systems of basic social insurance to protect those most vulnerable to the negative effects of financial crisis.

The above lessons learned constitute an argument for gender-responsive planning and budgeting. Gender-responsive budgeting involves integrating the different needs and conditions of access of women and men (and girls and boys) into all budget-related processes. These include planning, budget formulation and allocation, programming and budget implementation. Gender-responsive budgeting is designed to ensure that both sexes will benefit substantially from the use of public resources.

Gender-responsive budgeting is most effective when used by the government budget authority in the preparation and implementation of national and sub-national budgets. It can also be used by women's groups to monitor and analyze the use and flows of public expenditures and to advocate for increased resources to meet the specific needs of women and girls.

Communities and advocacy groups can work with governments, especially at the local level, to lobby for changes to disbursement or implementation processes that will ensure that services and programs meet the needs of both females and males and are equally accessible to both sexes.

THE 2008-2009 GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS AND ECONOMIC STIMULUS PACKAGES

In the Asia-Pacific region, the 2008-2009 financial crisis is expected to put 24 million people in danger of losing their jobs through falling exports and aggregate demand, reversals in domestic and foreign migrations, tightened credit markets and strained fiscal budgets (UNIFEM 2009). In the region, job losses are not evenly distributed across the working population partly because of gendered patterns occurring in labour markets. Employment opportunities for women are determined in part by their lower levels of participation in secondary and post-secondary education and training, one factor leading to sex segregation in the workforce. Female employment is dependent on the demand in female-dominated sectors and jobs (see Appendix). Additionally, male jobs tend to be more diversified across different sectors and industries (ILO 2009a). Thus, as contraction occurs in sex-stereotyped industries, job losses affect women and men differently and unequally.

Seven industry groups in the region have experienced the most pronounced negative effects of the financial crisis (ILO 2009a). They are:

1. textiles
2. garments
3. footwear and leather products
4. electronics (plus electrical and telecommunications products)
5. car manufacturing and auto-parts

6. hotels and restaurants
7. construction

Of these seven industries, women dominate the workforces of textiles, garments and, electronics and have a significant role in the footwear and leather product enterprises and in hotels and restaurants, while men dominate the construction and auto manufacturing workforces. Additionally, women who are employed in low-skilled jobs in the seven industry groups are concentrated in a lower pay level than men and are, thus, more vulnerable to lay-offs and declines in income (ILO 2009a). In Cambodia, the female workforce has suffered greatly from the financial crisis with 100,000 garment workers losing their jobs (out of 350,000 in June 2008: Chandrararat et al 2009). In most regions, reduced demand for labour did not automatically lead to layoffs but typically led to reduced work hours or lower wages. The World Bank (2009) estimates that an additional 14 million people in the region will fall below the poverty line by 2010.

Economic stimulus packages (ESPs), involving fiscal and monetary interventions, were introduced globally with varying degrees of success. In the Asia-Pacific region, ESPs have had strongly positive results in China, Vietnam, Singapore and Korea but limited impact in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand (World Bank 2009). The most successful ESPs are those that targeted infrastructure and social spending, while the least successful ESPs were dominated by tax cuts and untargeted social transfers (World Bank 2009). Additionally, most countries in the region delivered more fiscal stimulus than was originally announced.

A study of regional ESPs indicates that new spending on basic social services (e.g. health, education and sanitation) and increased fiscal support for export-oriented and labour-intensive industries can be beneficial to women by reducing pressure on them to take on unpaid work and mitigating job losses in women-concentrated sectors. However, there are still areas of ESPs that could be improved for women. In particular, the bulk of the fiscal spending is directed at large-scale infrastructure and public works, sectors which are dominated by male workforces (UNIFEM 2009) whereas, according to the lessons learned from the 1997-1998 Asian Financial Crisis, investments in small-scale and local infrastructure tend to be more gender-equitable.

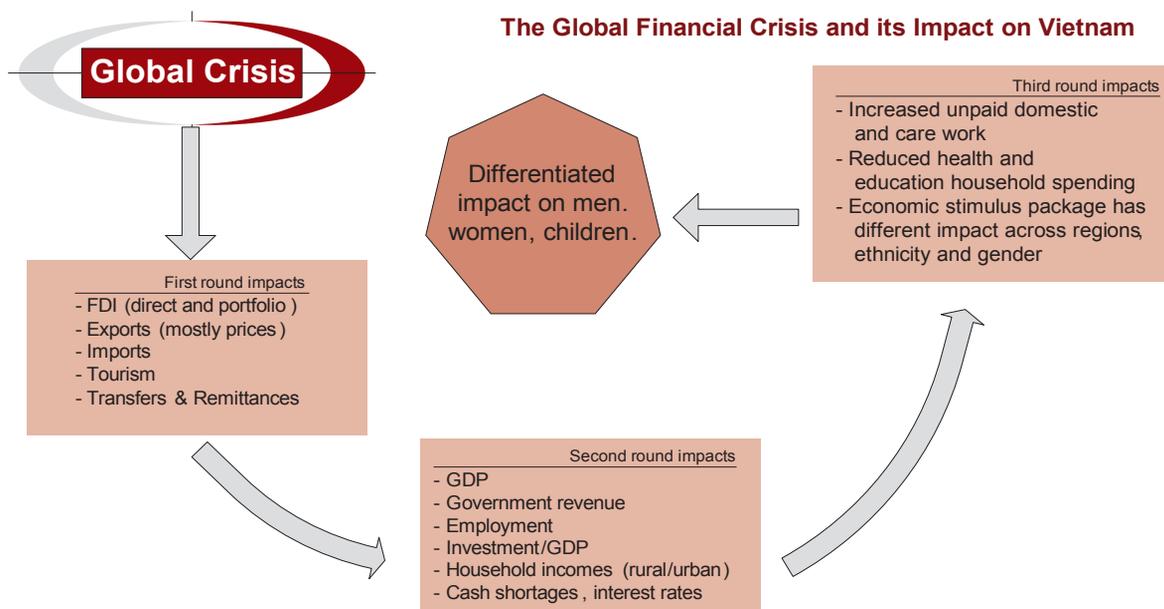
According to the World Bank (2009), the Asia-Pacific region is in a stage of rebound from the economic downturn. This is attributed to the “vigorous and timely fiscal and monetary stimulus,” particularly the Chinese ESP which strongly influenced the economies in the region. However, a recent study found that the differences between the stimulus spending allocations of developed and developing countries suggested a gender bias leading to a greater negative impact on women in developing countries. The study reviewed ESPs from 32 countries (including Vietnam) and found that developing countries were spending three times more (proportionately) on infrastructure and construction projects than developed countries; developing countries are only spending 0.2% on direct employment measures compared to 3% in developed countries; and developed countries allocated 10.8% to social measures compared to 6.8% in developing countries (Khatiwada 2009).

Durano and Hung (2009) also identified shortfalls in the Asian ESPs with regard to gender equality. They argued that for ESPs to ensure a “gender balanced recovery” required halting gendered employment declines through sector-specific support; re-balancing labour markets to expand occupational choices for women (including increasing education and training for women); strengthening gender-responsive social protection & social services; and gender-differentiated monitoring & evaluation.

THE VIETNAMESE 2008-2009 CRISIS, RESPONSE AND STIMULUS PACKAGE

TRANSMISSION MECHANISMS AND IMPACT

The impact on Vietnam of the 2008-2009 global financial crisis has not been as strong as initially expected, and indeed, with China, Vietnam has weathered the storm remarkably well. This was initially because the direct exposure to sub-prime lending and troubled assets in Vietnam was limited. Nevertheless, the indirect impact of the global recession was evident in Vietnam over 2008-2009 because much of the recent foreign investment commitments did not reach disbursement, export prices fell – as did remittance inflows, labour emigration and property and stock market valuations. The net macroeconomic impact, however, was only to cut 1.5-2% of expected gross domestic product (GDP) growth in 2009, and probably less in 2010 – although that impact was not uniform and certain segments of the population were affected much more than others, including women. Figure 1 shows the transmission mechanism through three “rounds” of impact that lead, eventually, to different consequences for women, men, and children.



As discussed above, Vietnamese women, like those in the rest of Asia, tend to be concentrated in textiles, garments, electronics, footwear and leather, and hotels and restaurants. Men in Vietnam are concentrated in car manufacturing and auto-parts and construction (ILO 2009a). In all seven industries there are a higher proportion of unskilled female workers than unskilled male workers, thus, women in Vietnam are more vulnerable to job losses and economic hardship.

A 2004 study on 21 garment and footwear enterprises throughout Vietnam found that women comprised more than 80% of the labour concentrated in low-skilled jobs on the production line (Mekong Economics 2004), making women particularly vulnerable to the financial crisis because of their low employment status. Another study on the footwear and leather industry in Vietnam in 2008, found that this industry alone employed about 650,000 workers – accounting for about 10% of total labour in industrial sectors. Women accounted for 81% of this labour. Between 2008 and 2009, most companies instituted reduced hours, wages, benefits and bonuses instead of, or just before laying off workers. Some insisted on unpaid overtime work (Nguyen 2009).

Job losses in 2009 were forecast to be as much as 400,000 in 2009 compared to 80,000 jobs lost in 2008 (EarthTimes 2009a), although the Vietnamese Ministry of Planning and Investment Institute (CIEM) had forecast a more modest 150,000. According to the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), 67,000 had lost jobs in enterprises already by January 2009. By September 2009 there were about 100,000 actual jobs losses recorded according to the Deputy Minister of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs Nguyen Thanh Hoa (Look at Vietnam 2009) – 31% of job losses were women workers; however, this statistic does not reflect workers without official contracts, the majority of whom are women (Thanh Nien News 2009). The World Bank (2009) has predicted that the unemployment rate in 2009 will rise to 5.5% compared to 4.7% in 2008. Jobs were lost as some enterprises closed, but most job losses were due to scaling back production, particularly in garment, footwear and electronics enterprises, and in many jobs, hours and wages have been reduced.

The job losses are modest for an economy with 44,915,800 workers in mid-2008 (GSO 2008). Of more concern is the medium-term issue about the slowdown in employment creation, which could be protracted. Vietnam still exhibits the demographic profile of a “young population”, with significant numbers entering the workforce each year. A slowdown could mean proportionately fewer employment opportunities for young women in some sectors.

THE VIETNAMESE RESPONSE

In line with responses taken by other nations in the region, the Vietnamese government introduced an ESP in December 2008. On 31 October 2009, the Vietnamese government announced it intended a second stimulus package for 2010, but details are pending.

The first ESP was introduced on 11 December 2008 under *Resolution 30/2008/NQ-CP on urgent measures* to deal with the economic recession, maintain economic growth and ensure social security. The ESP involved both fiscal and monetary interventions with a planned cost of US\$1.2 billion focusing on boosting production and businesses; strengthening exports; stimulating investment and consumption; guaranteeing social security; and endeavouring to achieve an economic growth of 6.5% in 2009. The four main components of the first ESP were (Le 2009):

Subsidized loan interest rates of 4% points to increase credit for investment for enterprises. Short-term loan contracts with maximum duration of 8 months and signed and disbursed from February 1, 2009 to December 31, 2009 will get interest rate assistance of 4% per Annum. The Vietnamese Government recently announced a 2% reduction in the subsidized loan interest rate (Vietnam Investment Review 2009). This component focuses on investment stimulus to ease firms’ credit access difficulties, create new jobs and increase domestic consumption

Public investment package for aiding infrastructure and social services. This included investment in large-scale traffic infrastructure projects such as highways, airports and seaports, as well as accommodation for workers, and health and education facilities.

Tax reduction for firms and tax exemption for individuals. Enterprises may benefit from a 30% Corporate Income Tax (CIT) payable deduction; an extension of up to 9 months for the deadline of submission of the tax payables of 2009; and a temporary refund of 90% input Value Added Tax (VAT) for exported goods without justifiable payment documents. For individuals, personal income tax (PIT) is deferred for 2009. VAT for selected goods and sectors were also reduced by 50%.

Social security package to support poor households including launching an unemployment insurance scheme with effect from January 1, 2009 as part of the economic stimulus. Accordingly, Vietnamese

workers who signed contracts of at least one year with foreign, government or individual companies will be eligible for unemployment insurance, accounting for 60% of the average salary of the employee. On 24 February 2009, the Vietnamese government decided to provide interest-free loans to enterprises for paying salaries, social insurances and unemployment subsidies for their workers. Additionally, workers can ask the local governments to pay their remaining salaries in case their companies go bankrupt. These measures are part of the government's efforts to deal with increasing unemployment in Vietnam due to the global crisis.

The fiscal interventions were aimed at reducing the tax burden on businesses and households and boosting aggregated demand included deferring PIT for another five months, reducing CIT, and cutting VAT for certain goods. The monetary interventions included increasing public investment in infrastructure and social services and introducing social securities packages such as financial support to low income families. Subsidized interest rate schemes were also used to continue access to credit and investment.

Table 1 presents a more detailed description of the stimulus package measures as they were introduced over time, building up from 2008, and in parallel with the evolving crisis and its subsequent management.

TABLE 1: MAJOR IMPACTS OF AND RESPONSES TO THE GLOBAL CRISIS IN VIETNAM, 2008-2009

Impacts	Fiscal Responses
<p>Rapid Inflation in 2008</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inflation at 12 year high – 22.97% in 2008 compared to 8.3% in 2007. • Inflation peaked in August 2008 at 28.3% • Driven by 49.16% increase in the cost of foodstuffs, 10.75% increase in beverage and tobacco and 20.51% rise in housing and building materials driven by the -construction boom 	<p>April 2008 Resolution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measures to restrain inflation, stabilize the macro economy and ensure social security and sustainable growth • Tight fiscal policy to reduce the budget deficit • Reduced public investment, especially in state-owned enterprises • Prioritized investment in the economic sectors
<p>Economic Growth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth fell from 8.48% in 2007 to 6.23% in 2008, the lowest level in almost a decade due to WTO-inflation. • Growth was expected to be 6.5% for 2009, but due to financial crisis will be about 5-5.5%. • Export revenues fell 6.5% in November 2008 and a further 24% in January 2009 (year on year) • Export growth declined 30% in 2008 and value of monthly exports remained flat throughout 2009 	<p>Dec 2008 Resolution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiscal expenditure (VND 100 trillion, USD 6 billion, 6.8 % of GDP) aimed at boosting production and supporting businesses, strengthening exports: • 4% interest subsidy on loans to SMEs (17 trillion VND) • Reduction in corporate income tax for SMEs (28 trillion VND) • Temporary refund of VAT for exported goods • Extension of time for payment of taxes • Deferral in recollecting advanced infrastructure construction capital (3.4 trillion VND) • Provided advances for urgent projects (37.2 trillion VND) • Transfer of planned investment capital in 2008-2009 (30.2 trillion VND) • Issue of government bonds (20 trillion VND) • Increased credit guarantee for enterprises (17 trillion VND) • January 2009 Decision No. 131/QD-TTg • Stimulus package of USD 1 billion to subsidize interest-rates for short-term loan contracts • Unemployment insurance for 60% of salaries

Impacts	Fiscal Responses
<p>Investment, trade and asset prices all fall</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Major falls in orders for manufactured exports including garments, footwear and furniture, as well as seafood products Tourist numbers fell in late 2008 and have not picked up since FDI inflows also fell; many projects are likely to be delayed or cancelled Stock market recorded its worst performance in its eight years of operation – the VN-Index fell 66.9% Surging trade deficit since April 2009 Non-Performing Loans in the banking system <p>Sales declined</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sales during the Tet holiday in January 2009 were down 50% from the previous year. Local consumer demand has remained flat Car sales were down 68%. Rural households most hit by falling cash crop and seafood (catfish, in particular) prices and remittance incomes. The downturn is also being felt by the middle class, and the rich. 	<p>March 2009</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fiscal expenditure (VND 300 trillion, USD 17.6 billion, 21% of GDP) Stimulating investment and consumption Exemption on personal income tax from Jan to May 2009 Investment in infrastructure for housing, schools, hospitals Tet bonus (200,000 VND or USD 12 per poor person, up to 1,000,000 VND or USD 56 per poor household). Support to 61 poorest districts Housing support for the poor (around 0.5 million rural households to receive 7.2 million VND or USD 400 each) Support for low income civil servants Measures to support manufacturing and export sectors
<p>Unemployment Increased</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Estimated 88,000 workers lost their jobs in 2008 Forecasts range from 150,000 to 400,000 job losses in 2009 Unemployment stood at 4.65% in February 2009 Business difficulties, particularly among export producers Reverse migration of the unemployed from the cities to the country side Landless poor find fewer opportunities to sell their labour days Decreasing remittances from overseas workers, which stood at 5-10% of GDP 	<p>Guaranteeing social security</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launched an unemployment insurance scheme with effect from 1 January 2009 (limited eligibility) Interest free loans to enterprises to pay salaries, social insurance or unemployment subsidies for their workers If companies cannot pay workers entitlements, workers can ask local governments to pay Other expenses on economic recession prevention and social security protection (7.2 trillion VND) Projects designed to support social security and welfare A comprehensive revision of the Labour Code that should result in market-based rules for employment contracts; employment of women, young workers and persons with disabilities; working time; protection of wages; and labour inspection.

Sources: Vietnam Business Forum (2009); Newspapers; *Cong Bao*.

The well timed stimulus package, combined with other factors ¹, meant that the negative impact of the financial crisis on Vietnam was less than that initially expected in late 2008. Vietnam managed to avoid economic recession. GDP growth, although reduced from the 6.23% in 2008, is now projected to be 5.5% and 6.5% growth in 2009 and 2010 respectively (World Bank 2009). In mid-November 2009 it was reported that the demand for skilled and unskilled workers in Vietnam had increased for commerce, construction, electronic spare parts production, garment and textiles manufacturing and footwear jobs; however, much of this increased demand is because workers are unwilling to work at the reduced wages being offered by businesses (Vietnam News 2009a,b).

However the stimulus package has not come without costs. Clearly there is the direct financial impact on the government budget, which suffered both from forgone tax revenue as well large expenditures, increasing the budget deficit to just under 9.4% of GDP in 2009, compared to 4.2% in 2008 (World Bank 2009). One concern raised regarding the short and long-term issues arising from the ESPs is that future efforts to balance budgets and stabilize the economy could lead to a

¹ These factors include the limited extent of household mortgages in Vietnam; close links to the resilient Chinese economy; a strong financial position of households before the crisis; the low value-added in much international trade; the minimal multiplier effects of most foreign investment; and the demographic bonus from the ongoing falling dependency ratio.

contraction on social spending which would negatively impact women (UNIFEM 2009). Inflation, another threat from the ESP, is estimated to be 7% for 2009 (CIEM 2009), as a result of increased credit and money supply (and may exceed 10% in 2010). Additionally, access to stimulus funding has not been straightforward particularly by firms hoping to benefit from the 4% interest rate loan subsidy; according to a Vietnamese State Bank report, only 22% of businesses, most of them state-owned, have been able to access the loans (EarthTimes 2009b).

THE SPECIFIC IMPACTS OF THE VIETNAMESE ECONOMIC STIMULUS PACKAGE ON WOMEN

The fiscal response in Vietnam has a significant and commendable focus on the social impact of the crisis, including the impact on vulnerable groups. However, it lacks explicit recognition that the impact and effects of the response may be systematically different for women and men. For example, the support provided to firms and enterprises is likely to benefit more men in the short term because more men than women are business owners and decision makers.

In this section we present an initial assessment of the Vietnamese ESP. A more detailed gender assessment of each element in Table 1 above is required for a more detailed understanding of the Vietnamese ESP. This implies an ESP monitoring and evaluation that includes sex-disaggregated data as well as data on gender issues such as time use and qualitative data on the impact of household coping strategies ².

The public sector infrastructure investments are designed to either stimulate the economy by increasing the general level of consumption, or directly mitigate the impacts of unemployment by creating jobs. Public sector investments should focus on labour-intensive projects that will create the most new jobs. Construction work is most likely to provide employment for men. Thus, although the public investment program will build housing, schools and hospitals that will eventually provide services that benefit women and children, the immediate beneficiaries are the men who are paid to build them. By the time the buildings are in service, the financial crisis may be over. In the meantime, women who have lost their jobs and are unable to find other employment may adopt coping strategies that have long-term damaging effects on themselves or their children, such as compromising their health and nutrition or selling off household assets, .

Vietnam introduced an unemployment insurance scheme for wage earners as part of the December 2008 package. However, this is only available to workers who sign at least a one-year contract with a foreign, government or individual company. Wage earning workers account for less than 22% of total employment (ILO 2009c). It is likely that many of these workers would not meet the criteria for the unemployment insurance scheme and also that fewer women than men would be eligible because many women in Vietnam work without contracts and thus fall out of the purview of the scheme (Thanh Nien News 2009).

Before the current financial crisis Vietnam was in the process of reforming and developing a national system of social protection. It already had in place mandatory social insurance systems for illness, old age, death, disability, work accidents and industrial diseases for public and private sector employees. Vietnam also had a voluntary social insurance system for the self-employed, farmers, students and those employed on a short-term basis or without labour contracts. Free means-tested social assistance was also available for vulnerable groups to provide cash transfers, access to health care and other basic services. The government was already introducing a gradual process of reform to extend

² The Indonesian 100 Villages Survey 1998 and 1999 provides an example of crisis monitoring.

coverage of voluntary social insurance, implement unemployment insurance and improve outreach of social assistance delivery when the crisis struck (GTZ 2009). However, data on aggregated social security coverage ratios for selected Asian countries show that only 6.5% of the population in Vietnam has access to meaningful protection compared with 10% in Bangladesh, 35% in Indonesia and 6.5% in Pakistan. Women are also often not covered by their husbands' pension funds (ILO 2009b). Women are generally disadvantaged by contributory social protection systems linked to formal sector employment because most of the most vulnerable women work in the informal sector or have non-standard conditions of employment and lower wages than men. (Cichon et al 2007).

Vietnam's economic recovery is being led by the construction industry; however, the manufacturing sectors are still facing challenges. The prominence of the construction industry in Vietnam's rebound suggests a possible gender bias within the ESP which has direct policies focused on infrastructure and construction. The construction industry in Vietnam is overwhelmingly male with a ratio of 9.97 male workers for every female worker (GSOV 2006 in ILO 2009). The manufacturing sectors, which are still struggling, are female-concentrated sectors in Vietnam. The ESP does not have any direct policies for the manufacturing sector, although they benefit from concessional loans and other general support.

The gender impact of the various initiatives of the ESP also depends on to what extent they have been implemented. According to a recent monitoring report (Action Aid and Oxfam 2009), for example, delivery of the Prime Minister's Decision No. 497/QĐ-TTg issued on 17 April, 2009 (regarding subsidised interests for loans to buy equipment and inputs for agricultural production and material for house construction in rural areas) has had little impact. It seemed that four of five provinces visited were not fully aware of the decision, and in Vinh, where they were aware, little had been implemented due to disbursement problems. The house construction scheme, for example, required a minimum purchase of 40 tonnes of concrete, while the average homes in the area required only 10 tonnes. The equipment that could be purchased had to be "home made," which most farmers did not want.

On the other hand, the monitoring report found that the student loans scheme was highly utilized. This built on the late 2007 scheme for poor students, but was extended to all households whose children reach the age of college and university entrance. Another scheme, however, to provide loans of VND 5 million to purchase study equipment floundered on the need for official invoices and the requirement to buy the equipment for a list of 30 state enterprises.

Clearly, there is a large difference between the hypothesized gender impact of a stimulus package and what happens in reality. Subsequent analysis must bring both together, and in doing so identify "what worked" and "lessons learned". This also raises questions about how any future stimulus package might assist the more numerous economic agents in the economy – such as small enterprises or those working in the informal sector. It is much easier to design initiatives to assist large enterprises, but at the lower levels the bureaucratic requirements imposed on procurement quickly exclude any small-scale beneficiaries. Yet the informal sector in Vietnam employs more people than the state sector. How to assist the disbursed millions – in small enterprises, formal and informal, or just generally in rural communes – is a design challenge for any future ESP. One channel, for example, would be to provide once-off direct contributions to the many commune-level charitable funds and other existing structures (such as Commune Education Committees).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MORE EFFECTIVE AND RIGHTS-BASED ECONOMIC RESPONSES TO FINANCIAL CRISES

Women are more than half the population, almost half of the labour force and an active force in the business sector. The Government of Vietnam must ensure that women and children do not suffer permanent depletion of their human resources as a result of the crisis. It must also ensure that women benefit equally with men from the fiscal response measures it has introduced. This is not just a matter of social justice and rights. It is an investment in the future growth of the economy and the development of the nation.

The Vietnamese government should employ gender-responsive budgeting in order to design and implement a more gender-sensitive fiscal stimulus package. In particular, the government should:

RECOGNIZE THE DIFFERENT IMPACTS ON WOMEN AND MEN; DESIGN RESPONSES ACCORDINGLY

Gender analysis to show where women and men are located in the labour force and how they have been affected by the crisis provides the basic information necessary for the design of an appropriate fiscal response package. Failure to start with such information will lead to misdirected and therefore inefficient investments. For example, if the majority of laid-off workers in export-oriented sectors are women then a labour-intensive investment program that creates jobs in construction and transport where the majority employed are men will do little to mitigate the impact on those losing the jobs. Smaller scale public infrastructure investments based on the use of local resources, as are currently being adopted in Indonesia, potentially offer a more gender-responsive approach.

In addition, policy responses should consider investment in social infrastructure projects in areas such as public health, education, child care and other social services. Social infrastructure projects not only help to generate jobs for women, as women are often heavily represented in these areas, but also serve to reduce the burden of care and unpaid work for women.

Furthermore, policy responses should be mindful that, during an economic crisis, women and girls might be more vulnerable to domestic violence, trafficking, and resorting to sex work, so interventions in these areas should be expanded.

CONSIDER WOMEN'S DOMESTIC AND CARE ROLES IN DESIGNING THE FISCAL RESPONSE

During a financial crisis, women in poor households are likely to be forced to juggle their household roles and child care with income-generating activities to provide for their families to a greater degree than what many women already experience when there is no financial crisis because there is greater pressure to generate income and increased household responsibilities. Programs intended to support them by, for example, food aid programs targeted at women and girls (which if purchased locally, can also benefit small farmers), providing free health care or skills training, need to be of suitable scale and consider the duration and timing of the program to ensure that women will have access. If the program is only available when most women are working in the fields, doing the daily marketing or taking children to school then they will not have access and the program will not be effective.

MONITOR HOUSEHOLD COPING STRATEGIES AND PROVIDE ACCESS TO BASIC SOCIAL PROTECTION FOR POOR HOUSEHOLDS

In order to avoid potentially harmful coping strategies in the poorest households, access to publicly-funded basic social protection is essential (Governance and Social Development Resource Centre 2009, Oxfam 2009). Without social support, families in the most vulnerable forms of employment may be unable to avoid harmful coping strategies, such as reducing expenditure on female health and/or education and increasing women's participation in informal sector low paid work with poor working conditions. In addition, temporary initiatives such as time-limited cash transfers specifically targeted to women or reducing school fees could help them weather the crisis and avoid such harmful strategies.

MONITOR THE IMPACT OF THE CRISIS THROUGH GENDER-SENSITIVE CHILD-CENTRED DATA

The impact of a crisis is specific to the particular situation. Responses that were effective in one setting may not be in another. Negative and unexpected impacts can arise very quickly. Effective monitoring of both the impact of the crisis and the impact of components of the fiscal response are necessary to enable emerging issues to be identified, components to be fine-tuned and excluded groups to be brought into the program.

Some specific aspects that should be monitored from a gender perspective are noted below. A prerequisite for such analysis, however, is a quantitative overview of "where women work", both in paid and unpaid employment. This should be a regular output, possibly sponsored by UNIFEM and conducted every five years. It would be a "stock take" based on existing secondary data³ about where women work and how they are remunerated relative to men. It would provide a quantitative breakdown of women's labour force participation – from the National Assembly down to households – and by industry sectors and state/non-state.

SPECIFIC CHANGES TO VIETNAM'S CURRENT ESP

Although it may now be too late for major changes to allocations within the current ESP, it is not too late to change the way in which they are implemented. The devil is in the detail: whether women and children benefit from even the more socially-oriented measures in packages depends on how they are implemented. It is not too late to address these issues. Some specific recommendations concerning the present and proposed ESP for Vietnam include:

1. Review eligibility criteria for the unemployment insurance scheme to ensure that it provides benefits equally to women and men.
2. Extend pension benefits to the surviving spouses of pensioners.
3. Initiate a gender-sensitive crisis monitoring system to assess the impact of the global economic crisis on women and children in poor households. Use the results to develop appropriate policies to avoid negative impacts on access to basic services, including health and education and particularly for women and girls.

³ In Vietnam such data would include the census (2009), Living Standards Household Surveys, and enterprise and labour force surveys.

4. Review the design and implementation of infrastructure investment programs to ensure that they provide employment for women as well as men.
5. Routinely monitor sex-disaggregated data on the beneficiaries of economic stimulus measures, including personal income taxation concessions, owners of enterprises benefiting from concessionary loans and company taxation measures and employment creation. Review the results on a regular basis and adjust policies or implementation to provide equal benefits to women and men.

CONCLUSION

In 2009, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) ⁴ called on governments to integrate a gender perspective into all measures to counter the negative impact of the financial crisis on women and girls. Failure to recognize and address the potentially differential impact of the crisis and fiscal responses on women and men results in de facto discrimination against women. Further, it makes economic sense to at least screen proposed stimulus packages from a gender perspective to protect and develop half of the nation's human resource base.

In future, it is recommended that the Government of Vietnam explicitly incorporate gender analysis in the design of further comprehensive stimulus packages. Such gender-responsive planning and budgeting can lead to greater results, not just for women, but for the economy and welfare of the Vietnamese people as a whole.

⁴ The 53rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women took place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 2 to 13 March 2009. More information can be found at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/53sess.htm>

APPENDIX: PRE-CRISIS CONDITION OF WOMEN AND MEN IN SELECTED ECONOMIES (MOST RECENT DATA)

	Cambodia		China		Indonesia		Lao PDR		Vietnam	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Labour force participation										
Participation rate	77%	88%	77%	85%	52%	89%	83%	82%	74%	81%
Female share of labour force	49%		46%		38%		51%		48%	
Sex division of labour										
Employees, agriculture, % of employment by sex	70%	71%			41%	41%			60%	56%
Employees, industry, % of employment by sex	12%	9%			15%	21%			14%	21%
Employees, services, % of employment by sex	18%				44%				26%	
Female share of non-agricultural workforce wage employment (2004)	52 %				29%				46%	
Wage and salaried workers (% of employed by sex)	14%	19%			36%	56%				
Unemployment (% of labour force by sex)	2%	1%			11%	8%	1%	1%		
Self-employed (% of employed by sex)	33%	49%			36%	56%				
Education										
Ratio of female to male enrolments in tertiary enrolment	56%		98 %		79%		68%		74%	
Ratio of female to male enrolments in secondary enrolment	82%		101%		99%		79%		92%	
Ratio of female to male enrolments in primary enrolment	93%		99%		97%		90%		94%	

	Cambodia		China		Indonesia		Lao PDR		Vietnam	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Leadership										
Female share of administrative and managerial positions (2005)	7%		6%		11%				12%	
Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament (2008)	16%		21%		12%		25%		26%	
Female headed households	24%				12%					
Access to social support										
% of women with health insurance+									54%	
% of poor with health insurance by sex+									13%	15%
% eligible for compulsory health insurance+									22%	22%
% of job-seekers registered with job agencies by sex 2005*			43%	57%						
% successful female job seekers placed through job agencies*			47%							
% participating in job training*			45%							
% female migrant workers with maternity insurance			7%							

Sources: * UNDP (2008), China Human Development Report 2007/08 Access for all: Basic public services for 1.3 billion people; +Ministry of Planning And Investment Viet Nam continues to achieve The Millennium Development Goals December 2008

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